



**MINUTES OF THE
Edina Transportation Commission**
Thursday, January 20, 2011
Edina City Hall
4801 West 50th Street
Council Chambers

MEMBERS PRESENT:

Tom Bonneville, Sarah Engbretson, Jennifer Janovy, Paul Nelson, Geof Workinger, Elin Schold Davis

MEMBERS ABSENT:

Jean White, Michael Schroeder, Bohde Scheerer

STAFF PRESENT:

Jack Sullivan, Sharon Allison

I. Call to Order

The meeting was called to order by chair Janovy. Chair Janovy welcomed one of three new members, Elin Davis, to the commission.

II. Approval of Minutes

a. Regular Meeting of November 18, 2010

Approval was postponed until the next meeting for lack of quorum.

III. Consent Agenda

a. Traffic Safety Report for December 1, 2010

The Traffic Safety Report for December 1, 2010, was accepted without comments.

IV. Community Comment

Mr. Jim Welna, 5139 W. 44th Street, asked if this was the only time to comment on the freight train presentation and he was told yes. He expressed his appreciation for the presentation and said this is first time that Edina has talked about it as a community and that there should be considerable concern as discussions take place, similar to St. Louis Park.

Chair Janovy said viewers can send comments to edinamail@cityofedina.com or regular mail to City Hall and that Council meetings also have a comment period.

V. New Business

a. MnDOT Rail Presentation – Dave Christianson, MnDOT

Assistant City Engineer Sullivan introduced Dave Christianson from MnDOT. He said Mr. Christianson has been involved in train transit for the last 25 years and most recently in charge of the freight rail division, working on state rail plan, investment policies, local freight rail planning, and truck support services and parking. Mr. Sullivan said the reason for the presentation was to help residents understand what is happening in St. Louis Park, how it may or may not affect their community, and to explain what is happening regionally and nationally with freight and passenger rail.

Mr. Christianson said there are approximately 4,500 miles of tracks in the state (down from 9,000 in 1980 when the railroad was deregulated) with 500 miles in the metro area. 95% of the railroad is privately-owned by 4 major companies (Canadian National, Canadian Pacific, Union Pacific, and Burlington Northern Santa Fe) and operation is much more efficient and profitable. He said 230 million tons of freight is moved annually which represents 38% of all freight moved in the state in comparison to 12% nationally. Commodities moved most often by freight are iron ore, lumber, paper products, and corn.

Mr. Christianson said future trends include annual growth of 1-2% and high speed intercity rail which is a new national and regional federal initiative that will grow around the country, including the twin cities. He said there are lines already in place traveling at 90 mph, and within six years, there could be a line from Chicago to the Twin Cities traveling at 110 mph.

Mr. Christianson said the MN State Rail Plan, a first of its kind for the state, which was adopted in 2010 and approved by the federal government, looks at passenger and freight rail as a public venture which simply means there is a consistent plan to keep them both in balance and growing. He showed a map of the passenger rail system in the MN Rail Plan. The map showed a connection to Chicago, with possible diversion to Madison, and on to LaCrosse, to Wisconsin Dells, with an alternate route through Eau Claire and on to Rochester. Other links on the map includes Duluth and Superior, Fargo-Moorhead, Mankato, and Rochester. In the metro area, he said the hubs would be the Northstar Station next to Target Field and St. Paul Union Station. He said there were many participants at past public meetings which demonstrate that there is lots of interest.

As it relates to Edina, Mr. Christianson explained that the rail coming southwest out of Minneapolis towards Lake Calhoun, Lake of the Isles, St. Louis Park and Hopkins, is referred to as the Kenilworth Corridor and this is the approved route for the Southwest LRT. He said if Kenilworth is approved, freight would not be able to use this line because there is inadequate right-of-way (ROW) and the original plan was to keep the bike path and have both freight and passenger rail. He said the line is important to the western district and because federal law requires freight line to have access to other connections, alternative routes are being examined. He said one route is the Dan Patch line (owned by Canadian Pacific) that goes through north Minneapolis, as an option to carry freight that would be removed from the southwest line. He said Hennepin County made a pre-emptive assumption that the freight line would be moved to the Canadian Pacific (Dan Patch) line and residents in St. Louis Park reacted. A third option is rebuilding tracks along TH-169. He said construction is tentatively scheduled for 2016 for the Southwest LRT; however, a final decision has not been made.

Mr. Christianson said freight traffic in Edina could increase and a passenger rail on the Dan Patch line could see four trains a day each direction traveling at 60-65 mph. He said an increase in freight could happen at any moment but the passenger line would involve a public process and this could be over the next six years. He said the Dan Patch line does not have consistent ROW because it was purchased after the cities were already platted and this is a problem especially in Edina, where additional ROW may be needed for construction of upgrades.

He stated further that if the decision is made to use Dan Patch, there would be a lot of changes in St. Louis Park. He said students are currently crossing the train track to get to the high school so this would require a pedestrian bridge, and there would be bike trail, pedestrian gates, barriers to keep everyone safe, and the ROW would be fenced to prevent derailment.

However, by installing these safety measures, he said the opportunity would exist for the line to carry more freight.

Of the three options being considered, Mr. Christianson said Kenilworth would be the most expensive because properties would need to be purchased for ROW.

Discussion

Mr. Christianson was asked what rights does Edina and St. Louis Park has to discuss what is done on freight line. He said very little. He said there are certain things that are required to do such as not blocking crossings for any longer than 10 minutes and making sure gate crossing and signals are always in working condition. He said residents can call the police for these violations. He said there has been a rise in complaints about parked freight cars with ethanol but this is legal. He said the only thing they can do is talk with the freight companies and ask them to be more customer-friendly. He noted that the line being discussed for the St. Louis Park area is a little different because public money is helping to fund the project and this requires the public involvement.

Clarifying the current maximum speed on Dan Patch of 10 mph and ROW as wide as 150 ft. and as narrow as 60 ft. in some areas, Mr. Christianson said the ROW would not allow for a dual line. He was asked if there was any chance of making this a passenger line and he said yes, but by state law they cannot study it as a commuter rail. He said it would have to be intercity rail which is different than commuter rail because it travels at higher speeds, stops are usually 15-50 miles apart and is intended to get people from one point to the next as fast as possible; commuter on the other hand mean trips to work and stops are spaced about 5 miles apart like the Northstar.

More information is available on the state's website or by contacting St. Louis Park to see everything that has been discussed to date. The next meeting is scheduled for mid-February to discuss mitigation measures and the process will continue for another 3-4 months then it goes to the Hennepin County Board.

VI. Planning Commission Update (Commissioner Schroeder)

Commissioner Schroeder was absent and chair Janovy announced that his term has ended as the representative from the Planning Commission.

VII. Bike Edina Task Force Update (Commissioner Janovy)

a. November 11, 2010 Meeting Minutes

Chair Janovy said they met in January and provided feedback on landscape islands in the Golf Terrace Street Reconstruction project.

VIII. Commission Comments

Chair Janovy announced that Commissioner Workinger's term has ended and thanked him for his contribution and leadership. Her sentiments were echoed by all of the commissioners. Commissioner Workinger said it was a pleasure serving. Chair Janovy also announced that Josh Sprague would no longer be serving as a commissioner as he was elected to the City Council.

IX. Adjournment

Meeting adjourned.